



AHAVAT ACHIM

קהלת אהבת אחים

THE FAMILY SHUL

PARSHAT VAEIRA | JANUARY 25 – JANUARY 31, 2020 | 28 TEVET- 5 SHEVAT | CANDLE LIGHTING 4:45PM | HAVDALAH 5:49PM

SHABBAT DAVENING

FRIDAY EVENING, JANUARY 24	
CANDLE LIGHTING:	4:45PM
MINCHA:	4:50PM
SHABBAT, JANUARY 25	
HASHKAMA MINYAN	8:15AM
MAIN MINYAN	9:00AM
LAST KRIAT SHMA	9:41AM
MINCHA/SEUDAH SHLISHIT:	4:30PM
MAARIV/HAVDALAH:	5:49PM
<p>is NOT recited at Mussaf</p> <p>is recited at Minchah</p>	
ROSH CHODESH SHEVAT	
MONDAY 1/27	
MOLAD	
SATURDAY 1/25 8:46 (9 chalakim) AM	

IN SHUL THIS SHABBAT

Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the **Sonnenblicks** on the Yahrzeit of Marty's mother Helene שא, הענטשא, מאטל בת ר' זלמן

SPECIAL EVENTS

The **Yachad/Yavneh Academy Shabbaton** is in one month, February 21-22. Please sponsor to defray our costs and support Yachad and this very special Shabbaton.



ADULT EDUCATION

Fundamentals of Jewish Thought:
Every Shabbat After Kiddush

Beginners Gemarah Shiur:

Mondays, 8:15 PM

(Hint: It's not just for beginners!)

GITA COOPERWASSER ע"ה YOUTH PROGRAM INFO

- Youth Chabura, 1st to 5th grade, meet Giselle Zimmerman at the main minyan, 9:00AM
- Teen Haftorah & Mussaf minyan for 6th-12th grade boys and girls starting 10:20AM in the Beit Midrash.
- 11th - 12th graders, meet Andrew Wigod at 11:00 AM.
- Tot Shabbat, 10:30AM.
- Email ideas/suggestions for the Youth Program to kira.batist.msw@gmail.com

THIS COMING WEEK

Rosh Chodesh Shevat is Monday!

Sunday: Sisterhood Planning Meeting - 8:00PM at Sara Santacruz's home

Tuesday: Board of Trustees meeting, 8:15PM

WEEKDAY DAVENING TIMES

	SUNDAY 1/26	MONDAY 1/27	TUESDAY 1/28	WEDNESDAY 1/29	THURSDAY 1/30	FRIDAY 1/31
SHACHARIT	8:15 AM	6:00 AM	6:25 AM	6:25 AM	6:15 AM	6:25 AM
MINCHA/MAARIV	4:50 PM					4:55 PM
MAARIV ONLY		8:00 PM	8:00 PM	8:00 PM	8:00 PM	



FUTURE EVENTS

Feb 1 - Brett Spier Aufruf

Feb 1 - Seudah Shlishit co-sponsored by Ilana Schwitzer and the Eismans on the Yahrzeit of Ilana's mother Rivka Malka Bat Freha and Yeish ^{ע"ה} and commemorating the completion of shloshim and sharing memories of Jamie's mother Ruth ^{ע"ה},
רות בת ר' יעקב

Feb 1 - Teen Billiards Night

Feb 1 - Family Havdalah Pajama Party for children 2-11, 6:45-7:45PM

Feb 8 - Eden Riskin Bat Mitzvah

Feb 14 - Oneg Shabbat

Feb 14 - Friday Night Lights

Feb 22 - Yachad Shabbaton

Feb 22 - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by the Agress family on the Yahrzeit of Stephen's father Rav Chaim Ben Harav Yehoshua ^{ע"ה}

Feb 29 - 3rd Annual Comedy Night, RSVP: <https://www.ahavatachim.org/aa-events/comedy/> Sponsorship opportunities available!

Mar 1 - Diaper Drive Event

Mar 6 - Oneg Shabbat

SPECIAL EVENT

Third Annual Comedy Night is getting close to selling out, get your reservations and sponsorships in now! Thank you to our current sponsor families: the Greenes, Garfunkel's and Winchesters.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

Feb 9 – Project Ezrah seminar "The Aisle", to educate newlyweds and engaged couples on the importance of talking about money and providing them with the tools to work together on a path toward a financially healthy lifestyle. 5:30 PM, Dinner included, no charge, advance registration required Theaisle@ezrah.org. Congregation Beth Abraham (396 New Bridge Rd. Bergenfield).

Feb 16 – Men's Taharat Mishpacha Refresher Class, reviewing the laws of Taharat Mishpacha and concepts needed to help ensure healthy marriages. Darchei Noam, Sunday night, 8:00 PM (live stream at home at <https://dno.am/youtube>)

KIDDUSH SPONSOR

- To sponsor a Kiddush (\$1000/\$613/\$318, plus scotch) email gplotnick@aol.com.
- If you are around when the Rabbi says "על המחירה", please assist in clean up.

PARSHA POINTS TO PONDER

- (1st) In this aliyah Moshe continues to resist speaking to Paroah, what is Hashem's response to Moshe's resistance?
- (3rd) We only receive Moshe's response to Hashem's command in this aliyah. what is Moshe's response to Hashem's command?
- (4th) According to the pschat, how did the Egyptians evade dying of thirst in the plague of blood? How is that an effective plague?
- (6th) What explicit transition occurs with the 5th plague to the animals, *dever*?

Answers to Points To Ponder

(1st) Hashem commands Moshe (and Aaron) to speak to Paroah.

(3rd) Moshe and Aaron do what Hashem commanded.

(4th) They dug wells around the river (v.24). It erodes faith in the consistency of the Nile both economically and religiously.

(6th) A division between the Israelite and Egyptian flocks (v.4).

ZEMANIM

	SUNDAY 1/26	MONDAY 1/27	TUESDAY** 1/28	WEDNESDAY 1/29	THURSDAY 1/30	FRIDAY 1/31
Earliest Talit	6:15 AM	6:14 AM	6:14 AM	6:13 AM	6:12 AM	6:11 AM
Gedolah	12:34PM	12:34PM	12:34PM	12:35 PM	12:35 PM	12:35 PM
Shkia	5:06 PM	5:07 PM	5:08 PM	5:09 PM	5:11 PM	
Tzait	5:51 PM	5:52 PM	5:53 PM	5:54 PM	5:56 PM	5:57 PM

**Earliest Kiddush Levana is Tuesday night, 1/28 (Shevat 3)

IN SHEVAT WE REMEMBER . . .



NAME	HEBREW DATE	CANDLE EVENING OF	DEDICATOR	RELATIONSHIP
Rebecca Malka	6	January 31	Ilana Schwitzer	Mother
Leonard Garfinkel	11	February 5	Shelly Winchester	Brother
Gloria Bader	18	February 12	Seth Bader	Mother
Leo Banner	19	February 13	Burton Banner	Father
Herman Levine	20	February 14	Kenny & Mark Levine	Father
Herman Levine	20	February 14	Naomi Levine	Husband
William Brody	21	February 15	Ron Sokoloff	Grandfather
Esther Rozenfeld	21	February 15	Zehava Baron	Mother
Isidore Irving Freilich	23	February 17	Eita Latkin	Father
Frieda Staub Cohen	25	February 19	Gloria Epstein	Mother
Goldi Smedresman	27	February 21	Steve Smedresman	Grandmother
Jonas Zuckerberg	28	February 22	Sophie Infield	Father
Rabbi Hyman Agress	29	February 23	Stephen Agress	Father

DONATE A SEFER, ETC.

The shul has Siddurim & Machzorim (\$36) and Chumashim (\$54) available to be donated. Please contact Jeff Safier at robysafier@gmail.com for details.

Yahrzeit Plaques

Memorialize a loved one with a plaque, \$300 for members and \$450 for nonmembers. We will strive to send you written notice of upcoming yahrzeit and announce name during public Yizkor. Email Larry at lardaybern@gmail.com to arrange.

SCRIP

Scrip is available from Men's Club. Email David at dmgarfunkel@gmail.com. Pay using Paypal (treasurer@ahavatachim.org) or use Discover, MasterCard or Visa - email treasurer@ahavatachim.org for details.

MISHEBAYRACH

With a Mishebayrach you've pledged to give Tzedakah on behalf of those for whom you asked Hashem's blessing. Contributions to the shul can be made via Paypal to treasurer@ahavatachim.org, or via MasterCard, Visa or Discover by sending info to treasurer@ahavatachim.org. If by check indicate on its face "Aliyah Donation."

MEN'S CLUB

Please contact Elliot Greene at MensClub@AhavatAchim.Org to join the Men's Club.

HONORARIA

The available Honoraria list will be provided upon request by contacting Steven Plotnick at seplotnick@gmail.com.

DAVID SCHWITZER נ"ע

SOCIAL HALL

Please contact Lori Garfunkel at garfmom@gmail.com to book the David Schwitzer נ"ע Social Hall for an event or special occasion. \$250 per simcha (members)/\$325 for Associates/\$400 paid in advance for non-members, plus the cost of any additional clean up (plus a \$150 security/cleaning deposit refunded when the social hall is returned in the condition it started in). Private caterers must be approved in advance by the Rabbi.

MITZVAH CARDS

Want mitzvah cards, contact Eita Latkin at 791-8940 or parentsof3@aol.com. Cost is \$3 per card. Also can be ordered in bulk - ten cards for \$25, which you send out yourself privately.

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The Weighing of the Heart

In this week's parsha, before even the first plague has struck Egypt, God tells Moses:

"I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply My miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt." (Exodus 7:3)

The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is referred to no less than twenty times in the course of the story of the Exodus. Sometimes it is Pharaoh who is said to harden his heart. At other times, God is said to have done so. The Torah uses three different verbs in this context: *ch-z-k*, to strengthen, *k-sh-h*, to harden, and *k-b-d*, to make heavy.

Throughout the ages, the commentators have been concerned with one problem. If God hardened Pharaoh's heart, how could he have been to blame for not letting the Israelites go? He had no choice in the matter. It was God's doing, not his. That he and his people should be punished seems to flout the fundamental principle of justice, that we are guilty only for what we have freely chosen to do.

However, the commentators noted that for the first five plagues, Pharaoh is said to harden his own heart. The obstinacy, the refusal, the intransigence are his. Only with the sixth plague is God said to have done so. This led to several explanations.

Rashi says that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the last five plagues was a *punishment for the first five*, when it was Pharaoh's own obstinacy that led him to refuse to let the people go.¹

Maimonides interprets God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as meaning that "*repentance was withheld from him*, and the liberty to turn from his wickedness was not accorded to him."²

Albo and Sforno offer the opposite interpretation. God hardened Pharaoh's heart precisely *to restore his free will*. After the succession of plagues that had devastated the land, Pharaoh was under overwhelming pressure to let the Israelites go. Had he done so, it would not have been out of free choice, but rather under *force majeure*. God therefore *strengthened* Pharaoh's heart so that even after the first five plagues he was genuinely free to say Yes or No.³

It may be that all three are right and are simply responding to the different verbs. *K-sh-h*, "hardening," supports Rashi's reading. Pharaoh was hard on the Israelites, so God was hard on him. *K-b-d*,

¹ Rashi to Exodus 7:3.

² *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Teshuva 6:3

³ Albo, *Ikkarim*, 4:25; Sforno to Exodus 7:3.

“making heavy,” supports Maimonides. Pharaoh lacked the energy, the strength, to repent. *Ch-z-k*, “to strengthen,” supports Albo and Sforno. The text allows for all three possibilities.

However, part of the truth may lie in a completely different direction.⁴ The Egyptians – Pharaohs especially – were preoccupied by death. Their funerary practices were astonishingly elaborate and were meant to prepare the person for life after death. The tombs of the Pharaohs were among their most lavish creations. Tutankhamun’s, discovered in 1922, is a dazzling example. One of the greatest literary works of ancient Egypt was *The Book of the Dead*.

The Torah notes the attention the Egyptians gave to death. At the end of Bereishit, we read of how the Egyptians accompanied Joseph and his family in the funeral procession to bury Jacob. The Canaanites witnessed this and said, “The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning.” They named the place, *Abel Mizraim* (Gen. 50:11). Note: they called it “the place of Egyptian mourning,” not Israelite mourning, despite the fact that it was for Jacob, a non-Egyptian. Then we read of how Joseph himself was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt. In the Torah, only Joseph, and Jacob at Joseph’s request, are embalmed. So we have already been forewarned about the significance of death to the Egyptian mind.

However, there is one specific aspect of Egyptian belief that opens up an entirely new perspective on the references to Pharaoh’s heart. According to Egyptian myth, the deceased underwent a trial to establish their worthiness or otherwise to enjoy life after death in Aaru, the Field of Reeds, where souls live on in pleasure for eternity. They believed that the soul resides in the heart, and the trial consisted of the ceremony of *The Weighing of the Heart*. Other organs were removed after death, but the heart was left because it was needed for the trial.

On one side of the scales was a feather. On the other, was placed the heart. If the heart was as light as the feather, the dead could continue to Aaru, but if it was heavier, it was devoured by the goddess Ammit (a combination of lion, hippopotamus and crocodile), and its owner was condemned to live in Duat, the underworld. An illustration, on papyrus, in *The Book of the Dead* shows the ceremony, undertaken in the Hall of Two Truths, overseen by Anubis, the Egyptian God of the dead.

“This would have had a highly specific meaning for the Egyptians of that time...”

It follows that the root *k-v-d*, “to make heavy,” would have had a highly specific meaning for the Egyptians of that time. It would imply that Pharaoh’s heart had become heavier than a feather. He would fail the heart weighing ceremony and therefore be denied what was most important to him – the prospect of joining the gods in the afterlife.

No one would have been in any doubt as to why this was so. The feather represented *Ma’at*, the central Egyptian value that included the concepts of truth, balance, order, harmony, justice, morality, and law. Not only was this fundamental to Egyptian culture. It was the task of the Pharaoh to ensure that it prevailed. This had been an Egyptian principle since a thousand years before the Exodus, found in Pyramid texts dating from the third millennium BCE. *Ma’at* meant cosmic order. Its absence invited chaos. A Pharaoh whose heart had become heavier than the *Ma’at* feather was not only endangering his own afterlife, but threatening the entire people over whom he ruled with turmoil and disarray.

One of the things the deceased were supposed to do as part of the trial was to make a series of negative confessions, 42 in all, declaring themselves innocent of the kind of sin that would exclude them from paradise. These are some of them:

I have not done injury to men.

I have not oppressed those beneath me.

⁴ My thanks to Rabbi Dr Rafi Zarum for suggesting this line of thought.

I have not murdered.

I have not commanded murder.

I have not caused suffering to men.⁵

If the “heavying” of Pharaoh’s heart is an allusion to the Weighing of the Heart ceremony, it allows us to read the story in a completely new way.

First, it suggests that it is directed to Egyptians as well as Israelites; to humanity as a whole. The Torah tells us three times that the purpose of the signs and wonders was “so that the *Egyptians* may know that I am the Lord” (Ex. 7:5; 14:4; 14:18). This is the core of monotheism. It is not that the Israelites have their God, and the Egyptians their pantheon, but rather that there is one sovereign power in the universe.

That is the point of at least three of the plagues: the first, directed against Hapfi, the god of the Nile; the second, frogs, directed against Heqet, the Egyptian goddess of fertility and childbirth, represented in the form of a frog; and the ninth, the plague of darkness, directed against Ra, the sun god. The message of these plagues would have been clear to the Egyptians: there is a power greater than those they have worshipped until now. The God of Israel is the God of the world and of all humanity.

The religion of Israel is not intended to be the religion of all humanity. Nowhere in the narrative does God imply that He wants the Egyptians to adopt Israelite religious practices. The point is quite different. *Religion is particular. Morality is universal.* If the story of the “heavying” of Pharaoh’s heart does allude to the Book of the Dead, then the story of the Exodus is not simply a partisan account from an Israelite point of view. It is telling us that *certain things are wrong, whoever does them and whoever they are done against.* They are wrong by Egyptian standards too. That was true of Pharaoh’s decision to kill all male Israelite children. That was an unforgivable sin against *Ma’at*.

**“Religion is particular.
Morality is universal.”**

Justice is universal. That is the point made plainly by the Torah’s three stories of Moses’ early life. He sees an Egyptian hitting an Israelite and intervenes. He sees Israelites hitting one another and intervenes. He sees Gentile shepherds behaving roughly to Jethro’s daughters and intervenes. The first was a case of non-Israelite against Israelite, the second was Israelite against Israelite, the third was non-Israelite against non-Israelite. This is the simplest way of telling us that Moses’ sense of justice was impartial and universal.

Finally, and most deeply, the Torah is hinting at a self-contradiction at the heart of the Egyptian concept of *Ma’at*. The most generous interpretation of Pharaoh’s refusal to let the people go is that he was charged with maintaining order in the Empire. A successful minority like the Israelites could be seen as a threat to such order. If they stayed and thrived, they might take over the country as the Hyksos had done several centuries earlier. If they were allowed to leave, other enslaved groups might be tempted to do likewise. Emigration is a bad sign when the place people are trying to leave is a superpower. That is why, for many years, the Soviet Union forbade Jews to leave the country.

Pharaoh, in his repeated refusal to let the people go, doubtless justified his decision in each case on the grounds that he was securing *Ma’at*, order. Meanwhile however, with each plague the country was reduced to ever greater chaos. That is because oppressing people, which is what Pharaoh was doing, was a fundamental offence against *Ma’at*.

On this reading, the whole issue of Pharaoh hardening his heart was not so much psychological as political. In his position as semi-divine head of state of an empire that practised forced labour on a massive

⁵ Negative confessions are rare in Judaism, but one exists: *Vidui Bikkurim*, the confession to be made over first-fruits: “I have not turned aside from Your commands nor have I forgotten any of them ...I have obeyed the Lord my God; I have done everything You commanded me” (Deut. 26:13-14).

scale, Pharaoh could not let the Israelites go free without creating the risk that other groups would also challenge the Corvée, the unpaid, conscripted semi-slave labour that was part of Egyptian society from the building of the pyramids and abolished only in 1882.

For the first five plagues, Pharaoh could tell himself that he was enduring minor inconvenience to protect a major principle. But as the plagues became more serious, reducing Egypt to chaos, Pharaoh's room for manoeuvre grew ever less. Having five times said "No" to the Israelites, he could not now back down without making himself look ridiculous, forfeiting his authority and damaging his standing. *Pharaoh was a prisoner of his own system*, held captive by his own decisions.

Seeking to protect order, he created chaos. That is because the order he was seeking to protect was built on a foundation of injustice: the enslavement of the many for the benefit of the few. The more he tried to defend it, the heavier his heart grew.

I believe that justice is universal. The Exodus story of how the supreme Power entered history to liberate the supremely powerless, is not just for Jews. It is the world's greatest metanarrative of hope.

Shabbat Shalom

Jonathan Sacks



AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

The **Family Edition of Covenant & Conversation** is an accompanying resource available to download each week from www.RabbiSacks.org/CCFamilyEdition (or via the main Covenant & Conversation email). It helps parents and educators take Rabbi Sacks' ideas from this essay and make them more accessible to teenagers. Each week, we will include three key questions from the Family Edition to inspire discussion around your Shabbat table. For more educational content as well as discussion pointers when answering these questions, please see the Family Edition!

- 1. What does the Torah mean by God "hardened" the heart of Pharaoh? Why is this problematic?**
- 2. According to our understanding of the Egyptian approach to death, what does it mean that Pharaoh's heart was heavy?**
- 3. What is the message of the Exodus narrative for the Jewish people and for the world?**



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